

Ducks Unlimited

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House Ag. Chair moves to fund wetlands and waterfowl conservation

Farmers and ranchers also benefit

WASHINGTON, July 2, 2007 – U. S. House of Representatives Committee on Agriculture Chairman Collin Peterson's (MN) wants to make conservation a top priority in this year's farm bill reauthorization. The chairman recently unveiled a new legislative approach that would save the Wetlands Reserve Program and protect native prairie.

"Chairman Peterson is advancing an idea that makes the future of the Wetlands Reserve Program and our valuable native prairie brighter," Ducks Unlimited Executive Vice President Don Young said. "We look forward to continuing our support of these programs as the process moves forward. We are grateful for the strong commitment to conservation Chairman Peterson is showing."

Some proposals would eliminate or weaken the Wetlands Reserve Program. Ducks Unlimited is working hard to make sure the program is fully funded to conserve and restore 250,000 acres a year and that farmers and ranchers get a fair payment for their wetlands conservation efforts.

Chairman Peterson's plan would provide money for the Wetlands Reserve Program in the new farm bill. The Wetlands Reserve Program has conserved almost 2 million acres since its inception. These acres are critical migration and winter habitat for waterfowl, as well as habitat for numerous other wildlife species.

"This new legislative proposal would continue and strengthen critical on-the-farm conservation efforts in the 2007 farm bill," said DU's Governmental Affairs Representative Bart James. "Chairman Peterson's idea would continue funding the Wetlands Reserve Program. This program is vital to waterfowl habitat conservation efforts."

Other competing proposals for the 2007 farm bill would make funding for the Wetlands Reserve Program contingent upon money being available in the future, or cutting funding from other conservation programs.

"You can't do effective habitat conservation with a 'rob Peter to pay Paul' mentality," James said. "We're still losing more than 80,000 acres of wetlands every year in the U.S. A weakened Wetlands Reserve Program would drive wetlands losses up dramatically, negatively impact hundreds of wildlife species and take away a stable source of income from farmers and ranchers."

DU members nationwide are asking their members of Congress to fully fund the Wetlands Reserve Program and other farm bill conservation programs. Even with the new proposal, there's still a need to find funding for the Grasslands Reserve Program.

"DU members are being heard in Congress," said DU President Bruce Lewis. "But it's important for them to continue contacting their senators and representatives about ensuring conservation in

the farm bill. We need all members of Congress to support sodsaver and adequate funding for programs like the Wetlands and Grasslands Reserve programs.”

Native prairie, especially in the duck producing Prairie Pothole Region of Montana and North and South Dakota, will gain greater protection through the inclusion of a “sodsaver” provision. Sodsaver will remove incentives for farmers and landowners to convert native prairie for agricultural production.

The Prairie Pothole Region is America’s most endangered ecosystem. Native prairie remaining in the Dakotas is the nation’s most important duck production habitat. Its rapid loss is being fueled by expanding production of soybeans, corn and other crops.

With more than a million supporters, Ducks Unlimited is the world’s largest and most effective wetland and waterfowl conservation organization with almost 12 million acres conserved. The United States alone has lost more than half of its original wetlands – nature’s most productive ecosystem – and continues to lose more than 80,000 wetland acres each year.

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